



Boundaries and resilience are connected. Boundaries help you maintain a strong sense of self, which is essential for resilience.

Resilience and Boundaries

Setting boundaries is not selfish. Prioritizing your own needs allows you to be more resilient so you can better help others.

By Amy L. Grice, VMD, MBA

Resilience is the ability to withstand, bounce back from and even pre-empt stressful situations. Boundaries play a key role in developing and maintaining resilience. They show others acceptable ways of communicating, interacting and behaving with you. With healthy boundaries, you are able to say “No” without guilt. You don’t compromise your values to please others. You can share your needs and wants comfortably and can accept others saying “No” to you.

Some people have rigid boundaries that keep others at a distance to avoid the

possibility of rejection. They might be protective of personal information and often have difficulty asking for help. Others lack boundaries, which can lead to oversharing of personal information, difficulty saying “No” to others and getting too involved in the problems of others. They fear rejection if they do not do what others want, so they are susceptible to being taken advantage of or disrespected.

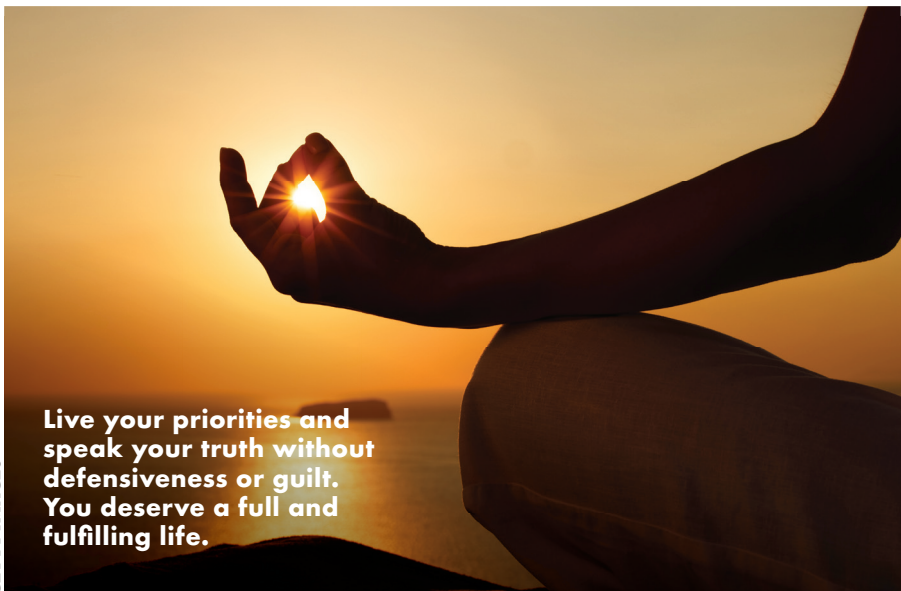
Having healthy boundaries can help you create better relationships and improve your mental health. Before setting boundaries, it’s essential to understand your values. They are your true north when determining what is acceptable

and unacceptable in your relationships and life. By reflecting on what is most important to you in life, you can make a list of your top five values and prioritize them. Use these values as your guideposts when establishing boundaries.

Perhaps the most important boundary you can set as an equine veterinarian is limiting your availability. It is also critical to understand that when you set a boundary, how others react to it is not your responsibility.

Creating Better Relationships

Living your priorities and speaking your truth without defensiveness or guilt re-



Live your priorities and speak your truth without defensiveness or guilt. You deserve a full and fulfilling life.

quires believing that you deserve to have a full and fulfilling life that includes many facets—meaningful work, family, friends, recreation and time for spiritual, community and personal pursuits.

Being authentic and honest about what you expect from—and offer to—others can lead to higher respect and trust from people. That is because they have a clearer understanding of the experience they can expect when interacting with you.

In return, you attract people who want you as you are, which creates much better relationships. Clear boundaries are the foundation of living according to your values and priorities.

Caitlin Daly, DVM, owner of Mid Coast Equine in Maine, said of boundary setting: “As with most of life, there is a learning curve with boundary setting. Early on in my own personal experience, I felt like I was telling people how I deserved to be treated. I was telling them what they could not do. I felt like I needed to be on the defensive.

“My communication style was aggressive to make sure that I’d be heard while simultaneously attempting to control the situation. I was trying to take back what was mine that I had given away when I

lacked any boundaries at all. For me at that time, boundaries were more about demanding respect from someone else while not giving myself that same level of self-respect. I quickly learned that being on guard all the time was exhausting. I was waiting for someone to cross my boundaries so I could then set them straight.”

She continued by saying, “What I know now is that boundaries are there to tell people how they can choose to interact with me. And in the word ‘can’ there is a choice, and it’s not my responsibility to make that choice for them. It’s my responsibility to let someone know what their options are and let them choose. People are who they are. As much as we think we can, we cannot control their actions. We can only control our response to them.”

Limiting Your Availability

Maintaining your mental health requires that you not allow yourself to be constantly available to others. Set expectations for when texts, phone calls and emails will be returned. This gives you space for rest and recharging your energy. This self-care leads to higher resilience.

Despite a client wanting to have a

prolonged conversation with you at the moment they would like to have it, this is often impossible. Developing boundaries and being able to discuss them from a neutral mind space can improve your well-being tremendously. By regaining control of your time, you might feel less pressured and trapped by the demands of your work.

“We set boundaries by having all communication flow through the office,” said Travis Boston, DVM, a partner at Willow Creek Equine Veterinary Services in Pennsylvania. “This has reduced the mental load substantially, especially with buy-in from all of our veterinarians. It allows us to truly rest and reset when we are neither working nor on a call, making us much more comfortable and efficient doctors when we return to work.”

This doesn’t mean that you don’t care about clients or don’t want to fully answer their questions and ease their concerns. It means that you might be tired, have other obligations or need time to yourself. Because your life has a lot of elements, you sometimes have to shift priorities, and not everyone can be your number one priority at the same time.

Trying to please everyone all of the time is a path to burnout. Feeling the need to be perfect in all aspects of your life and meet everyone’s needs first, before your own, is common in equine veterinarians. Unfortunately, that erodes your well-being and resilience.

Rachel Liepman, DVM, DACVIM (large animal), is a busy internal medicine specialist at Cave Creek Equine in Arizona. She said, “Having two phones—a work phone and a personal phone—has been career changing for me. The ability to decide who has my work phone number and trying my best to observe work hours when answering calls and texts, when possible, helps to set a boundary with clients so they know they cannot get ahold of me at any time they please.

“I’m fairly choosy about who gets this number, and my clients appreciate the access when it’s granted to them, as they understand my boundaries. I also try hard to communicate what business hours are, so they realize that they should make an effort to contact the office if outside business hours. Setting auto-reply messages and turning off my phone when on vacation have helped me separate from work when I’m not working.”

Reactions to Your Boundaries

Because you cannot control others’ reactions when you set boundaries, you must become comfortable with being uncomfortable.

To stick to your boundaries, you must learn to tolerate others’ emotional reactions to the steps you are taking to care for yourself. Many people are not used to having boundaries with others, so they might respond in anger, surprise or frustration. It often can help to explain why you cannot agree to their demand or request while assuring them that you care about them and, if they are a client, their horses.

While some will understand if you explain that your boundaries are necessary for maintaining your well-being, others might feel entitled and view your decision as selfish.

Relationships worth sustaining are the ones in which people accept each other’s boundaries. Allow those who are struggling with your boundaries to contemplate whether they can adjust, but know that their ultimate behavior is not your responsibility.

Katherine Fertig, DVM, owner of Ocean County Equine in California, sets an example of living her priorities.

“I prioritize time to ride and show my horse,” she said. “I ride two to four weekdays by asking my staff to schedule my first appointments on those days for 10:30 a.m. whenever possible. Obviously, sometimes things need to happen be-



Setting boundaries can help you regain control of your time, which can make you feel less stressed.

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fore then, whether it is a lot of appointments or an emergency. But my staff tries to give me as many days to ride as possible, as they know I’m much nicer to be around if I’m riding regularly.

“I don’t mind working later if it means I get to ride in the morning!” she stressed. “We don’t tell the clients that I’m riding—just that the time they are requesting isn’t available. When I’m showing and clients need an appointment on that day, we schedule it only if they are willing to be flexible on timing because I don’t usually know my ride times until the evening before.”

Take-Home Message

When setting boundaries, be clear, firm and respectful. Avoid apologizing for the boundaries you set. You are not responsible for how the other person reacts; you are only responsible for being respectful when communicating your boundaries.

Understanding your personal limits is crucial when setting boundaries. Knowing when to say “no” or when to step away from a situation will help you maintain balance, avoid burnout and increase resilience. By knowing your physical, emotional and mental limits, you

will be able to recognize signs that you’re approaching your limit, such as irritability, fatigue, resentment or depression.

During a crisis, your boundaries and those of others are likely to be flexible, and this is healthy. You can make more time for people you care about even when it’s less convenient for you, and they can offer the same to you when needed. However, expectations for that flexibility should be limited.

Boundaries and resilience are connected. Boundaries help you maintain a strong sense of self, which is essential for resilience. When you have healthy boundaries, you can better manage your emotions and responses to challenging situations. They empower you to take charge of your life and make decisions that support your well-being.

Taking care of yourself physically, emotionally and mentally is an essential aspect of building resilience and maintaining healthy boundaries. Setting boundaries is not selfish; it is a necessary part of overall well-being.

Setting boundaries is a form of self-love and self-respect. By prioritizing your own needs, you become more resilient and better able to help and support others. **EM**